

Madam/Mr Chairperson, members of the committee,

My name is Charlotte Kelley and I am here today in support of HB 590, Medicaid Expansion. I am from Billings and am here as a working veteran in the state of Montana. The expansion of Medicaid will give as many as 70,000 working Montanans health care coverage and this bill will likely open up many new jobs in the healthcare industry. I personally feel this bill is necessary for our legislature to pass.

Not only am I a Montanan, but I am an honorable veteran of this nation, and yet even when I am working I cannot afford healthcare. Even though the last company I worked for offered healthcare benefits to their employees, the rate of pay would mean that after paying for insurance, I would have only about 7,520 dollars take home pay each year. If I was to include my children and pay for a family plan I would bring home significantly less. The unfortunate truth is that I am not the only veteran in Montana who works and goes without healthcare coverage. This expansion would include somewhere close to 10,000 veterans and their family members. These are the people who have fought for your freedoms, became injured for your safety, and live with the shroud of war over them for the rest of their natural lives.

It is estimated that this expansion would bring nearly 14,000 jobs to our communities. I realize many politicians worry that this bill will bankrupt the state in years down the line, but the big picture shows us that by bringing jobs into the state, employing those who may already be "living off the state", will help boost the economy here. I personally will graduate in June with a degree in Healthcare Studies. I would like to believe that my state is looking at boosting our economy so that there is a job here for me. A job that pays me well enough that I won't need to live off the state, but instead I can take my job and pay my taxes and spend the money that I earn in other places around the communities in which I live.

I want to stay and work in this state, and I also feel that everyone in this state is worth good and affordable healthcare. By placing money into the people, the working people, you bring more to the state. If in one breath legislators can give more money to the coal companies and in the next breath say there is no money for the health of our people, then our state has already lost. The people have already lost. Please, pass HB 590. It is in the best interest of this state and its people.

Charlotte Kelley